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The Honorable Donald H. Rumsfeld
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Room 3E880
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Dear Mr. Secretary:

This letter provides you with observations from our recent fact finding visit to Iraq. The main purpose of the visit was in response to Ambassador John D. Negroponte's invitation to observe the National Assembly elections. While there, we also discussed the security situation, training of Iraqi security forces and economic reconstruction.

Over the course of seven visits to Iraq during the past 21 months, while noting fragile progress and persistent setbacks, nothing has compared to the unmistakable triumph of this election. During our first visit to Umm Qassar in April 2003, Mr. Mohammed Abdul Hassan said to me, "Like in your country someday I will get to choose my own leader." That day has come for Mr. Hassan and millions of other Iraqis.

On election day, we visited two polling stations. In a suburb of Irbil, at the Ainhawa polling station (#212004), we saw hundreds of Iraqis voting. They were obviously relishing their historic moment. In the United States, we vote and leave the polling

station. The Iraqis did not leave, staying within the grounds proudly displaying their ink-stained index fingers as defiant proof of their power to determine their own fate.

At a Baghdad polling station in the international zone, we met with representatives of the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq. The chief operations officer, Mr. Adil Al Lami, predicted a substantial voter turnout. While others counseled a more cautious approach, his confidence appears to have been justified. Voters reportedly walked over the remains of a suicide bomber to vote.

We should be grateful the majority of Iraqis rejected terrorist demands, but we should not fool ourselves into believing our work in Iraq is coming to an end. Interim Iraqi President Ghazi Yawar told us he saw no losers in the election except the terrorists and those who chose not to participate. Building an inclusive, pluralistic, secular governing structure remains the primary challenge as Iraqis move forward to advance this impressive expression of popular will.

It is critical new Iraqi officials reach out to all groups, especially during the next phase of Iraq's democratic process – the development and ratification of a constitution. If other ethnic groups are not included in development of a constitution, Iraq's cycle of violence will continue hampering progress.

While ethnic, religious and tribal groups jockey for relatively advantageous positions, transitioning internal security to Iraqi control will be an extremely difficult and essential undertaking this year. This already daunting challenge appears to be compounded by a lack of clear strategic objectives and lingering tensions between the Departments of State and Defense over security matters. The sense of distrust and antagonism between both departments is noticeable and has impeded a realistic assessment of Iraqi security needs and capabilities.

Despite the highly-praised performance of Iraqi police and military forces during the election, it is still not clear the police or soldiers being trained are being put into an integrated management structure that can achieve the security mission. There does not appear to be a plan for transitioning security from Coalition forces to Iraqi forces, and there is no established metric to determine when Iraqi security force battalions are capable of accepting responsibility for their sectors. Police trainees are simply sent home, with little or no follow-up to determine if their training was adequate or is being sustained.

President Yawar told us Ambassador L. Paul Bremer's attempt to change Iraq from a state run economy to a private one was a mistake. Iraqis were not ready for this change. Iraqis have long been dependent on state-run companies and the government for many services. This dependence has stifled individual initiative.

Economic reforms must regain their footing during this uncertain period. However, little progress has been made moving Iraq from a predominantly cash economy. This has a direct impact on security when the new nation's police and soldiers, stationed away from local tribal or ethnic influences, have to travel home – often across country – to deliver money to their families. We were told, some have been targeted by insurgents and killed on the journey. Most Iraqis remain dependent on state subsidies for food and fuel. Basic services – electricity, water, sanitation – have not noticeably improved. Retail and commercial banking systems have not been established.

As the U.S. role in Iraq has transitioned from custodian to advisor, it is essential we avoid the temptation to do too much for the Iraqis and stress instead advice that will empower them to seize their own fate, make their own mistakes and build their own future. And as we consider drawing down the number of Coalition military forces, we should also consider drawing down the number of civilian advisors we have imbedded in Iraqi government agencies. This should allow Iraqis to accomplish things on their own and gain the needed confidence to govern themselves.

These observations are offered in the hope they will be of use in crafting the plans and policies that will capitalize on the inspirational, truly historic birth of a new democracy in Iraq on January 30. As always, I would welcome the opportunity to discuss these matters with you more fully. If you have any questions, please contact me or Dr. R. Nicholas Palarino at 202-225-2548, who has accompanied me on all of my trips to Iraq.

Sincerely,

Christopher Shays
Chairman